

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

COMMUNICATING

*Information called for by the resolution of the Senate, of 30th May, 1848, in relation to the existing condition of Yucatan.*

MAY 31, 1848.

Ordered to lie on the table and be printed.

*To the Senate of the United States:*

I transmit, herewith, reports from the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Navy, with accompanying correspondence, which contain the information called for by the Senate in their resolution of the 30th instant, relating to the "existing condition of affairs in Yucatan."

JAMES K. POLK.

WASHINGTON, May 31, 1848.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
Washington, May 31, 1848.

The Secretary of State, to whom was referred the resolution of the Senate, of the 30th instant, requesting the President "to send to the Senate, if in his judgment not inconsistent with the public interest, a copy of any communication from Commodore Perry, or from any other authentic source, containing additional information connected with the existing condition of affairs in Yucatan," has the honor to lay before the President a translation of a note, under date the 23d instant, addressed to this department by Mr. Sierra, the commissioner of Yucatan. This note contains all the information in the possession of this department, relative to the condition of affairs in that State, which has not already been communicated to the Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

JAMES BUCHANAN.

To the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, May 31, 1848.

SIR: In obedience to your directions, I have the honor to transmit copies of communications received at this department, since my last report on the same subject, required by the resolution of the Senate, of the 30th instant.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
J. Y. MASON.

The PRESIDENT.

*Translation of a note from the commissioner of Yucatan to the Hon. James Buchanan, Secretary of State.*

WASHINGTON, May 23, 1848.

SIR: Although it may be for the last time, allow me to bring to the hearing of the government and people of the United States the expiring voice of Yucatan, perishing as she is, not only by the murderous knife of the barbarians, but from the horrible effects of famine, already beginning to extend its ravages over the unfortunate beings who have escaped the fury of the assassins. I address the present note in compliance with express orders which I have just received, under date of 1st of this month of May.

True it is, sir, that the government of Yucatan had submitted to all the conditions of a treaty of peace with the barbarians, in which, in order to save from extermination the rich and important cities of Fewax and Izanal, the only barriers restraining the savages, who were about to fall upon the capital, the said government consented to accept all the sacrifices required by the Indians, even to the sacrifice of the republican principle so much revered by the people of Yucatan. And this was done, not because the slightest faith was placed in the treacherous and felonious conduct of a race which it pleases some now to call civilized, without their having any other titles to that appellation than those given by our absurd policy, which called them to participate in the enjoyments and rights which they cannot comprehend, and they probably never will comprehend, judging by the brutal stupidity with which they have resisted them; but it was done in order to obtain a moment for breathing, and to see if it would be possible in the end to obtain the assistance which had been so earnestly entreated, in the most holy name which can be invoked towards a christian people.

But, sir, not for a moment could any advantage be secured by this ignominious submission to the savages. Emboldened by this new and decisive triumph, they treacherously violated the peace on the very day when it was concluded, and setting at naught the compact dictated by themselves at their own pleasure, they rushed forth again in the career of extermination and destruction with ever increasing fury. The towns of Iturbide and Zibalchen were destroyed on the third day after the conclusion of the peace; the

cities of Izamal and Fewax must have already undergone the same fate; and if so, the capital, Merida, must have been placed in imminent peril. I cannot delay you by making any commentaries on this treacherous and infamous conduct, as I find no epithets sufficiently energetic to apply to it.

Mr. Secretary, the situation of Yucatan, so far from having been improved, has already reached a point absolutely desperate. And for its greater misfortune, the captain general of the island of Cuba has expressly refused to afford any further aid, *from reasons of high policy*. The Secretary of State may easily conceive what these reasons are.

Famine and misery, combined with all the pervading panic, are now about to produce the most strange and terrific consequences, even among the people of the white race themselves. Disarmed, starving, and naked, the wretched people of Yucatan, unless the protection and mercy of God should move the generous hearts of the people of the United States, are about to perish in a manner never before seen on earth; in a manner of which history offers no example; and only because their misfortunes are not understood, and they are judged, not from positive and certain evidence, but on vague and slight assertions.

In compliance with the new orders which I have just received, I again implore the generous aid of the United States. Give us, sir, arms, arms and munitions of war, in the first place; a little assistance in money, if possible, in order to appease hunger, and to clothe the nakedness of our wretched people; and some regiments to assist us in repelling the savages, who are murdering us, robbing us, and destroying all the wealth of the country, hitherto so flourishing. This assistance can alone save that most unfortunate people, who have never been *cowards* in reality, but whom a number of causes have combined to cast into humiliation and misery.

I lose no time in communicating to the secretary these new supplications of Yucatan, and I pray him to communicate them to the President of the United States, that he may use them as he may prefer.

I repeat to Mr. Buchanan, &c.,

JUSTO SIERRA.

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*Extract of a letter, dated*

UNITED STATES FRIGATE CUMBERLAND,  
Vera Cruz, May 16, 1848.

Enclosed is a copy of a letter just received from Lieutenant Commanding McBlair, of the "Stromboli," at Campeachy, which contains the latest intelligence from Yucatan. I also forward two communications addressed to me by ex-Governor Mendez and Monsieur Villereque, the French consul at Campeachy, which I regret cannot be translated in season for the departure of the steamer by which this despatch is sent.

Under all the circumstances, I shall not consider myself authorised to take any step, other than the employment of two or three small vessels upon the coast, in aid of those unhappy people, without instructions from the department.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, sir, your obedient servant,

M. C. PERRY,  
*Commanding home squadron.*

Hon. J. Y. MASON,

*Secretary of the Navy, Washington.*

U. S. BRIG STROMBOLI,  
*Campeachy, May 10, 1848.*

SIR: I have been urged to address you, in the most earnest terms, concerning the crisis which seems rapidly approaching in the affairs of this city. I am sensible, however, that I can add but little to the ample accounts you have already received, from various quarters, of the lamentable condition of the whole province.

The treaty with Jacinto Pat, as every one anticipated, has been of short duration. In consequence of its repeated and gross violations, by the Indians, General Stergo has addressed circulars to the public authorities, declaring it null and void. The immediate provocation to this measure was the capture of Mani, and the massacre of all the inhabitants who had not fled, amounting to one hundred and fifty persons.

The latest accounts state that Pat is at Peto, and that Chi, after having succeeded in obtaining a supply of fifty arobas of powder, was advancing upon Ixmal.

Intelligence reached us yesterday of the approach of the Indians within ten leagues of this place. A body of them, about 2,000 strong, surprised and routed a small force of militia, and captured Xtok. Throughout this community the most lively apprehensions are entertained, but neither the authorities nor the people seem animated by a spirit at all equal to the occasion. They have taken no precautions, and make no preparations, that, in any manner, correspond with the dangers with which they suppose themselves threatened. With the exception of raising a force of 500 men, who are to march against the Indians as soon as their organization is completed, no important step has been taken. In addition to this force, the only one under arms in the city consists of 500 militia, recruited from the poorest classes, and miserably fed, and paid by private subscription. It is said that between two and three thousand men can be promptly raised, but there is a total want of means of equipping them. There seems to be no disposition on the part of the men of property, tradesmen, mechanics, or, in short, of those who have something at stake, and feel a real interest in the preservation of the city, to bear their share in the toils and dangers of its defence.

They prefer hiring a miserable soldiery, more prompt, it is said, to pillage than to fight.

Great fears are felt that, on the approach of the Indians, riots and disorders will occur in the throngs that will be driven to seek shelter within the walls; arising from the destitution of all means of subsistence, to which large numbers will be reduced. There will be assembled, perhaps, 40,000 souls, taking into account the inhabitants of the suburbs and the fugitives from the interior. A large proportion of this multitude will consist of Indians, whose sympathies with their race will be likely to render them disaffected. There can be very little doubt that all these dangers are magnified by the panic which seems to have seized upon all minds; but I am reluctant to believe for a moment that, if the Campechanos are true to themselves, and profit by the ample means of defence with which the city is provided, there is any well-grounded fear of its falling into the possession of the Indians.

Answers to the overtures made to our government, by Yucatan, are still anxiously awaited. Mr. Hendez received recently letters from the commissioner at Washington, which promised no prospect of aid from that quarter; they were written, however, before the despatches sent by the "Falcon" had arrived. A communication has been received from the British minister, which gives the government encouragement to hope for assistance from England, as soon as the condition of affairs is made known there.

It is urged by men of intelligence here that foreign aid, in an emergency so pressing, cannot justly be regarded as a political question. It resolves itself into a simple act of humanity. The war is one of extermination, on the part of the Indians; characterized by the most ferocious cruelty, and directed against a civilized community, far inferior to them in numerical force; and it is earnestly contended that, in such an unhappy exigency, the appeal that has been made for succor and protection cannot, with any show of justice, be denied.

It is very far from my purpose to offer any opinion of my own on a question at once so delicate and of that magnitude; and I have permitted myself to allude to what the Yucatecos urge in their own behalf, solely with a view of exhibiting to you public sentiment, on that subject, as it exists here.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

C. H. McBLAIR,  
*Lieutenant commanding.*

Commodore M. C. PERRY,

*Commanding home squadron.*

[Translation.]

CAMPEACHY, May 9, 1848.

RESPECTED SIR: Although I have received no letter from you since your departure from this city, I take the liberty of intruding on you, because the situation in which we find ourselves is most



distressing, and, perhaps, desperate; and because I cannot persuade myself that, while you have the means of saving at least this beautiful town and the capitol of the State by extending some assistance to us; and while your government views with dissatisfaction, and is even disposed to prevent our obtaining assistance from other powers, it will leave us to perish; and take pleasure in the spectacle of the prolonged agony, and the destruction of a civilized and friendly people, who, perhaps, on account of their being friendly, are now involved in this terrible calamity.

You will have been apprised that I retired from the governorship and transferred it to Don Miguel Barbachano; and you will also have been informed that the object of this political measure was to facilitate the conclusion of a truce with a portion of the insurgent Indians, whose chief manifested a disposition to come to terms, but was apparently distrustful of any other governor than Señor Barbachano. The agreement referred to was, in fact, concluded, and Mr. Barbachano had to ratify it with closed eyes, although it covered us with shame, and himself especially, since it is asserted in the 5th article that the object of the insurrection was to replace him in the governorship, which is absolutely false; but it was necessary to overlook everything, with the view of neutralizing a portion of the insurgents, and being able to make head against the others, thus gaining time to see whether the United States would resolve to aid us, or consent that some other power should do so, and receive in payment the sovereignty and dominion of the peninsula of Yucatan.

But all has been unavailing; for, whether the chief Jacinto Pat was actuated by bad faith, or was unable to compel his followers to obedience, the convention has been disregarded by them, and they have invaded other towns, slaughtering a multitude of victims, and are now preparing, after having destroyed the beautiful towns of the district of Hopelchen, belonging to the department of Campeachy, to besiege this city, from which the insurgents are only twelve leagues distant; and in which, although we might arm 3,000 men, and sustain ourselves a long time, if we could reckon on some assistance in provisions and munitions of war, yet we have only 600 muskets—a number too small and insignificant for the defence of the town, which must succumb, miserably, a victim to the egotism (pardon my grief for indulging in this expression) of the United States, unless you resolve to aid us, if you can do nothing else, at least with 2,000 of the muskets found in Vera Cruz when it capitulated.

I hope, Mr. Commodore, that you will, for this once, and while you are awaiting the orders of your government, which I have no doubt will be favorable to our wishes, risk your responsibility somewhat by following the impulses of your heart, which cannot otherwise than incline you to aid us in our extreme affliction and peril.

So may God prosper your nation and government, yourself and family, &c., &c.,

SANTIAGO MENDEZ.

Com. MATTHEW C. PERRY, *Vera Cruz.*

*Translation of an unofficial letter to Commodore Perry from one of the principal citizens of Campeachy, transmitted to the Navy Department by Commodore Perry.*

CAMPEACHY, April 28, 1848.

MY DEAR SIR: Persuaded as we are, by the news from New Orleans, that the government at Washington has resolved that you should assist us with the squadron under your command in the most efficacious manner, we are most anxiously expecting the arrival of a part of your squadron which shall disembark marines, which, if not enough to operate actively against the Indians, will at least be sufficient to sustain the authorities of the country in encouraging our own troops to march against them. But, unhappily, your esteemed favor of the 12th instant informs us that you have as yet had no instructions, and that without them you could not interfere in our behalf, however sincere your wishes in our favor might be. We are still hoping that, in consequence of the communication from this government to that at Washington, which the "Falcon" took to New Orleans, you have now received the necessary orders. Our situation grows every day more deplorable. The Indians are already in the district of Campeachy, which is without troops to check their advances.

The terror which the barbarians inspire is inexplicable, even to us who have witnessed this desolating war from its commencement. The governor, Barbachano, has commenced a treaty of peace with an Indian chief, called "Pat," who, it appears, is at feud with another principal chief, called "Chi." The object which the governor has in view is to create dissensions among them. For this reason, it has seemed necessary to yield to certain conditions, which are shameful and degrading in the extreme, and which sufficiently show the pitiful condition to which we find ourselves reduced. Our only object is to gain time, until we learn whether a powerful nation like the United States will aid us. It is evident that all the whites, who would save themselves from the knives of the savage Indians, should seek an asylum in a foreign land. We therefore beseech you, as soon as you may have received the necessary authority, to put into execution (with your accustomed energy) all the means at your disposal in our behalf.

Your excessively alarmed friend,

JOAQUIM GUTIERREZ DE ESTRADA.

P. S. I have just received positive information that the treaty has been signed between Governor Barbachano and the Indian "Pat," but we also learn that some of his followers refuse obedience. We suppose, of course, that "Chi," and the Indians of the east, will not adhere to it. O that you could only give us a hope that you are coming to our aid.

[Translation.]

CONSULATE OF FRANCE, AT CAMPEACHY,  
*Campeachy, May 9, 1848.*

MR. COMMODORE: You have no doubt been accurately informed by the commanders of your ships of war of all the events which have taken place in Yucatan since your departure from Campeachy. I shall, therefore, call your attention only to the last, the treaty concluded on the 19th of April, at Tyucacal, with the Indian chief Jacinto Pat, of which you must also have been apprized. However shameful and disastrous it may have been for the honor and for the interests of the white race, it was nevertheless accepted with a certain eagerness. The bad faith and perfidy of the Indians created, indeed, some distrusts, but it was hoped that the treaty might be observed for the space of at least some months, and this delay would afford time to receive succors from the United States or England. All these hopes were destroyed the day before yesterday, by the arrival of a courier, sent from Tieul by the general-in-chief, to apprise General Don Jose Cadenas that the treaty of the 19th of April was annulled, by the resumption of hostilities on the part of the natives, and by the great perfidy of Jacinto Pat.

We already knew that the latter, instead of repairing to Tekan, with 50 men only, to confer with the commissioners of the government, on the means of pacifying the rest of Yucatan, had presented himself there at the head of 10,000 Indians, and that the troops of the government had, from prudence, retired to Tieul. We already knew that these bands of bandits, although already bound by the treaty, conducted themselves in Tekan as in a conquered town, pillaging every thing at their pleasure, breaking the doors and windows of the houses, tearing away the gratings, and maltreating the white inhabitants; but we were ignorant that Peucuyut and Mani were besieged, and that the last mentioned town had fallen into the power of the insurgents. There they have renewed the conflagrations and assassinations which peculiarly characterise this war of castes. At present Pat is marching on Ficul; he has also sent another division of Indians towards Hecelhakan, for the purpose of cutting off our communications with Merida. Finally, it appears that the force at his disposal amounts to 15 or 18,000 men. The government had at Ficul only 800 men, who have retired to Merida.

On the other hand, during and after the signature of the treaty of Tyucacal, other large bodies of Indians, over whom Pat pretended to have no authority, were ravaging the whole eastern part of the districts of Campeachy, Iturbide, Xibalcheu, Komcheu, Xcupileacal, Hopelchen, Boloucheu-ticul, &c. It is now proved that these hostilities were committed by the orders of Pat, and that he feigned to come to terms of accommodation merely for the purpose of getting from the government the 2,500 muskets granted by the treaty, and in order to procure the powder and lead which he wanted. All these bands are now marching on Campeachy, from which they are hardly nine leagues distant. In the whole district



there can no longer be found a single soldier in the field to retard their progress—all are dispersed or concealed. Means have been found, however, to organize here a body of 500 men, who are paid by the merchants of the place. But this body, composed of the remains of the militia, is demoralized to such a degree that they can hardly be induced to mount guard in the entrenchments which have been erected to defend the entrance to the suburbs. I am, therefore, convinced that these positions will be abandoned so soon as the Indians show themselves. The suburbs of Campeachy, which are much more important and much more populous than the town, will then fall at once into the power of the Indians, and if they should choose afterwards to make a serious attempt on the town, they will infallibly get possession of it, because this garrison of 500 men is not sufficient to confront at all points 20,000 assailants. There are still, however, at Campeachy 2 or 3,000 able bodied men, who might be armed. Unfortunately, General Cadenas has no more muskets to distribute among them, and the captain general of the Havana, to whom Mr. Mendez applied, has answered that he sent to Merida all that were at his disposal, and with these Merida has not arms enough to be able to furnish any to Campeachy.

The capital of Yucatan is in a still more dangerous position, for it is not, like Campeachy, surrounded by a bastioned wall. Its preservation, therefore, depends wholly upon the courage of its defenders, and you are not ignorant, Mr. Commodore, that the Meridians are not heroes. I therefore consider that town as irrevocably lost, if it is left to its own resources only. I hope, at least, that its inhabitants, protected by the militia troops there, may be able to effect their retreat to Sisal, where they will find Spanish ships of war to receive them.

All the misfortunes, all the dangers, which I have just represented to you, were long ago foreseen by the government of Don Santiago Mendez, who, in order to put an end to them, promptly despatched his son-in-law, Mr. Justo Sierra, to Washington. The trifling aid which was solicited more than four months ago has, unfortunately, not yet been granted by the government of the United States; now that the strength of the insurgents has increased tenfold, it will require an expedition consisting of 8 or 10,000 men, to put them down completely. The display of such a force here is out of the question, unless by England, who might determine upon it in order not to lose her colony of Wallis. The government, the proscribed race of Yucatan, at present ask only of a friendly power, that 500 men may be sent to aid them in preserving, at least, the town of Campeachy, and if that power should not find it expedient to accept, in return for this service, the sovereignty of Yucatan, it might at least claim credit with the Mexican government for having preserved for it a rallying point in the peninsula, which will hereafter enable it to reconquer the country. And certainly for this the president of the republic, and the whole nation, would feel in the highest degree grateful. Thus, in a political point of view, this measure which

the General-in-Chief Butler may take the responsibility of adopting, in concert with you, Mr. Commodore, will essentially contribute to draw closer the ties of good neighborhood, which peace is about to establish between the United States and Mexico. I will abstain from discussing here the question of humanity. Its rights and duties are too well understood by the government of the United States to permit it in cold blood to condemn the remains of a population of 80,000 souls to perish in their last asylum, when a slight effort on its part may save them. But there must be no longer any delay in sending the assistance. The condition of affairs have now become so grave and urgent, that a day, even an hour lost, may result in the most fatal consequences. If General Butler considers the sending of these 500 men in the true point of view, he will be convinced that it will not be such an intervention in Yucatan as can give umbrage to the Mexican government; on the contrary, he will render a signal service to the republic, for which it will be obliged to him, and for which the government of the United States will certainly be thanked.

This long letter which I have addressed to you, Mr. Commodore, in order to interest General Butler and yourself in the sad fate of the town of Campeachy, has been dictated to me by the misfortunes, by the despair, indeed, of this population, who are crying aloud for the aid and protection of the United States, and who have not arms to defend themselves. If General Butler can, in addition to the 500 men, send 2 or 3,000 of the muskets found in the arsenal of Vera Cruz, in the fortress of Perote, or on the fields of battle, 2 or 3,000 able bodied men will be found here to carry them. With these means of resistance, public spirit will be reanimated, and the large number of defenders will inspire confidence and courage in the most cowardly.

Nor can I conceal it from you, that many of the principal inhabitants of the town and the ex-governor have also begged me to write to you and to transmit to you a communication from the latter. I have yielded with pleasure to their request, because all that this honorable man represents to you of the deplorable situation of Yucatan, is literally true, and because I myself partake of their sad anticipations of the future, and of their hopes in the United States.

Permit me then, Mr. Commodore, to urge you by all these motives of policy and humanity, and by the sympathy which I feel for this unfortunate population, and particularly for Mr. Mendez, my friend, to be pleased to plead the cause of these unfortunate men, and support it with all your influence with General Butler.

I have the honor to offer you, Mr. Commodore, the assurances of my high consideration.

LAISRÉ DE VILLEREQUE.